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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report, one of several prepared for a comprehnsive study of early childhood education in Illinois, was to collect, compile, and analyze specific data concerning early childhood education policy and practices from all fifty states. Each state was queried regarding the following: (1) compulsory attendance age, (2) mandated age/cut-off date for entry into kindergarten, (3) local district criteria for entry into kindergarten (particularly where statutes permit local discretion), (4) screening/testing requirements, (5) mandated and/or recommended class size for kindergarten through third grade, (6) problems associated with entry age and screening, (7) competencies/testing requirements associated with promotion to first grade, and (8) recent or proposed legislation for changing kindergarten policies. Descriptions of each state's kindergarten requirements are provided. Problems associated with early childhood education and the resulting recent changes in kindergarten policies are indicated. Charts and graphs in the appendices show survey information for all fifty states, detailing each state's mandates and policies. (DST)

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THE STATUS OF KINDERGARTEN: A SURVEY OF THE STATES

Illinois State Board of Education

Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Springfield, Illinois

January, 1985

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Walter W. Naumer, Jr., Chairman
State Board of Education

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State Superintendent of Education

FOREWORD

In response to a request from the Illinois State Board of Education, staff were directed to conduct a comprehensive study on early childhood education. This report on a survey of the states was prepared by Margaret Whaley, Ph.D., Planning and Policy Analysis Section, Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The interpretations and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the State Board of Education.

Ted Sanders
State Superintendent of Education

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this report was to collect, compile and analyze specific data concerning early childhood education policy from all fifty states. Each state was queried regarding: 1) compulsory attendance age; 2) mandated age/cut-off date for entry into kindergarten; 3) local district' criteria for entry into kindergarten, where statutes permit local discretion; 4) screening/testing requirements; 5) mandated and/or recommended class size for kindergarten through third grade; 6) perceived problems associated with entry age, screening, or others; 7) competencies/testing requirements associated with promotion to first grade; and 8) recent legislation or proposed legislation for changing kindergarten policies. This information was obtained to show what practices exist among the states. Data were collected during September and October 1984 by contacting early childhood education specialists in each state education agency and through referrals to other state personnel.

The report provides information regarding similarities and differences among the states in compulsory attendance; kindergarten entry requirements; and screening, promotion and class-size policies. The survey revealed some problems associated with early childhood education and resulting recent changes in kindergarten policies. Charts and graphs in the appendices show survey information. Each state's mandates and policies are described. No attempt was made to seek information regarding funding.

REQUIREMENTS AMONG THE STATES

Compulsory Attendance Age

In many states the compulsory school-attendance age is one year later than the required age for kindergarten entry. In other states, children completing kindergarten at age six may be attending first grade with seven- and eight-year-old children. Twenty-six states require first-grade attendance at age six; in twenty-one other states, children must attend at age seven. In three states--Arizona, Pennsylvania and Washington--children need not enter first grade until age eight, but many attend kindergarten at age five. Compulsory attendance age by state is shown in Appendix A.

Providing Kindergarten

Slightly over one-half of the states mandate the provision of kindergarten programs. In states where provision is optional, most local districts do offer programs. Mississippi is the only state where kindergarten programs are not offered at the present time. While a significant number of states have attempted to mandate kindergarten attendance, currently only Delaware, Florida and Louisiana require children to attend. In September 1985, attendance will become mandatory in Kentucky.

Age for Entering Kindergarten

While forty-three states require that children be age five by a certain date (cut-off date) for kindergarten entry, several make provisions for earlier entry. These provisions permit local district decisions regarding earlier entry and frequently take into consideration identification of giftedness, general readiness of students for kindergarten (determined by testing or

teachers' knowledge of children's skills), and mobility of students among states. Mandatory age cut-off dates by states are shown in Appendix B. As shown, fifteen different cut-off dates are used to determine kindergarten eligibility, ranging from age five with no specific cut-off date to age five by January 1.

Screening/Promotion/Class-Size Policies

With the exception of handicapped students, a majority of the states have no statewide laws for assessing children for entry into kindergarten. Less than a dozen states require some type of screening; these are primarily for potential health problems. Some states which permit early entry rely on the teacher's judgment of the child's readiness skills. In at least half of the states, assessing readiness prior to kindergarten entry is an area of concern to early childhood specialists, particularly where early entry is permitted.

Similarly, criteria for promotion to first grade are determined by local districts in at least forty-three states. A few states recommend basic skill levels or are in the process of developing policies and procedures to assure that students have mastered some skills felt to be essential.

In approximately twenty states, kindergarten class size is determined by state statutes, many having been recently enacted. Statutes frequently permit more students per class with the presence of an aide. State education agencies recommend class sizes in six states. In all other states, class size is determined locally.

Geographical Similarities

Although there were no discernible geographical patterns regarding compulsory attendance age, there were such patterns in kindergarten entry criteria. With few exceptions, states west of the Mississippi River tend to require children to be older to enter kindergarten, whether determined by state law or local policies. Twelve of these states require children to be age five on or before the first day of school or at least by the end of the first month of the school term. Exceptions exist in three states: Alaska requires children to be five by November 2; Hawaii requires children to be five by December 31; and California requires children to be four years and nine months by September 1.

Generally, the northeastern states tend to permit kindergarten entry at an earlier age than do other states. In many of these states, children may enter kindergarten after as much as three months of the school year have passed. An example is New Jersey, where children may enter any time between the ages of four and six. (Seventy percent of all five-year-olds are enrolled in any given year, even though many of their birthdates are as late as December 1.)

More diversity was found in entry-age requirements in the sunbelt states than in other regions. Two of these states require children to be age five by October 1, others range from age five with no mandated cut-off month to age five by December 31.

Problems

The survey revealed that limited funding in many states was perceived as a problem and that states also have similar problems in areas other than funding. Complaints come from parents when children's birthdates are near the age cut-off dates and when there are age conflicts associated with state-to-state mobility. The frequency of these complaints has often resulted in legislative changes to earlier cut-off dates, requiring children to be older for entry into kindergarten. Another area of change has been in recommendations/mandates for smaller class sizes. Parents also tend to complain about perceived unreliability of screening/tests; some think the kindergarten curriculum is inadequate. Although these areas are generally left to local control, complaints have drawn attention to them. States having mandates and clearly defined state policies which can be cited tend to report fewer problems associated with early childhood education.

SUMMARY

The compulsory attendance age varies in the states from age six to age eight. Twenty-six states require first grade attendance at age six; twenty-one require children to begin first-grade at age seven; and three require children to enter first grade when they reach age eight.

Three states currently require kindergarten attendance and another will in September 1985. Every state except Mississippi provides kindergarten programs in most local districts. Mississippi expects to begin programs in the 1985-86 school year. Forty-three states have mandatory age cut-off dates for kindergarten entry, and a considerable number of these have provisions in their laws for earlier entry. Where entry criteria are determined at the local district level (seven states), policies consider age, identification of giftedness and overall readiness skills, generally established by teachers' familiarity with children. States west of the Mississippi River tend to require children to be older for kindergarten entry. One fifth of the states require children to be age five by the beginning of the school term, and approximately one-half require them to be age five before the second month of the school year. Excluding seven states, where kindergarten entry is determined locally, there are fifteen different age cut-off dates that determine eligibility for kindergarten.

Other than for children identified as handicapped, most states permit local districts to establish their own entry-assessment mechanisms and criteria for promotion to first grade. In almost one half of the states, class size is determined by local option.

Funding for current programs, as well as expansion of programs, is almost a universal problem. Many states have other problems in common, such as those associated with mandatory age cut-off dates, screening and testing, overcrowded classrooms, and the content of the kindergarten curriculum. These problems have led to recent changes in mandates, local policies and current reviews.

Recent legislation has primarily addressed a move to earlier age cut-off dates, smaller class sizes, and attempts at making kindergarten attendance mandatory. Nationwide, state legislatures have not yet considered kindergarten a top priority; however, based on the information obtained from the survey, interest in this area is growing.

DESCRIPTION OF EACH STATE'S KINDERGARTEN REQUIREMENTS

Alabama

Each child must enter first grade on or before October 1 in the year of the child's seventh birthday. Children must be five years of age by October 1 to enter kindergarten. Children are accepted into kindergarten until they qualify for first grade, but parents may keep a child at home at their discretion. Local districts may make allowances for children transferring from another state. Testing is not mandatory, is just beginning to be used, and is used primarily to assist teachers in placing a child in the first grade. Kindergarten programs in the public schools were developed as pilot programs in 1973. Provision of programs is permissive. The State Education Agency recommended class size for kindergarten is 25 students per teacher, and with larger classes a teacher aide is recommended. There are currently no statewide promotion requirements, and there have been no recent legislative proposals for change.

Alaska

Children must enter first grade by November 2 in the year of their sixth birthday and may enter kindergarten on or before November 2 in the year of their fifth birthday. Although kindergarten is not yet mandatory, most schools provide programs. Each child must receive health, speech and hearing screening tests. Local districts are permitted to determine class size and to conduct competency testing for promotion to first grade. Legislation has been introduced to make kindergarten programs mandatory. There are conflicting views regarding the state's role with church-affiliated preschools and elementary schools.

Arizona

Children are required to enter school by January 1 in the year of their eighth birthday and must be five by September 1 to enter kindergarten, unless parents request earlier entry and a developmental assessment is conducted. The state has no guidelines for class size. All children must be screened for possible handicapping problems within forty-five days of school entry. Districts must provide kindergarten programs. Investigation is currently under way about learning problems associated with early entry. There have been no changes proposed recently. The State Education Agency is seeking state and/or federal funds for programs for all 3-5-year-olds.

Arkansas

Children must enter school by October 1 of the year of their seventh birthday and must be five years old by October 1 to enter kindergarten. Provision of kindergarten programs is permissive. Early entry is determined by local criteria. If a child is six and is just entering school, statutes require an evaluation which determines placement into kindergarten or the first grade. The State Education Agency is stressing a developmental approach, including the use of readiness tests. However, this process is left to local-district discretion, as are promotion/retention criteria. The recommended kindergarten class size is now 25 students; the maximum recommended is no more than 30 for grades 1-3.

Borderline entry-age dates are among common parental complaints; kindergarten curriculum is another area of concern. Legislation proposed for 1987 includes provisions for smaller class sizes - no more than 20 kindergarten students without an aide and no more than 25 students in grades 1-3 without an aide. Arkansas legislators are taking an interest in early childhood education and will propose legislation in the next session.

California

The compulsory attendance age is six. To enter first grade, children must be five years and nine months old by September 1 and must be four years and nine months by September 1 to enter kindergarten. Although kindergarten attendance is not mandatory, all schools are required to provide programs. There are no mandates or state policies for screening. Classes are not to be in excess of 33 students for kindergarten or 32 for grades 1-3. In kindergarten, the teacher's judgment is used for promotion/retention to first grade. The state provides monetary incentives to school districts who offer extended school days; this may include kindergarten during the next school year.

Colorado

While the compulsory attendance age is six, the month is determined locally. Children under age six are placed in kindergarten; there is no mandatory cut-off month. Entry is basically determined by teacher knowledge of children's readiness. A child who shows readiness before the age of five may be enrolled. There are no statewide competency requirements for promotion to first grade. In order for schools to receive accreditation, kindergarten classes, which must be provided, must have no more than fifteen students; they may have up to twenty with an aide.

Among problems reported are inconsistent screening methods, varying entry ages, funding, and a push by parents for more academics in kindergarten. There are no current legislative proposals for kindergarten, only for handicapped preschool children.

Connecticut

Children must be enrolled in school if they will become seven by January 1, and must have reached their fifth birthday by January 1 to enroll in kindergarten programs, which all districts must provide. Screening policies are at local discretion, as is promotion to first grade. There are no mandated or recommended class-size provisions; however, these are under review. Currently, problems exist with the age cut-off date, the need for before- and after-school day care, and with local autonomy over curriculum. There were unsuccessful attempts to change the mandated compulsory attendance age from seven to five and to extend kindergarten hours daily from 2 1/2 to 4 hours; legislation will again be proposed. The feasibility of programs for four-year-olds will be investigated.

Delaware

Children must begin school if age six by January 1 and must attend kindergarten if five years of age by January 1. Delaware is currently developing state standards for testing and competency requirements for

promotion for kindergarten through third grade. Legislation to make the provision of half-day kindergarten classes mandatory became effective September 1, 1984.

Florida

Kindergarten is mandatory for all children at age five. Screening is determined locally; there is no mandate for competency testing for promotion to first grade. The State Education Agency sees establishing consistent screening policies as a difficult task. The legislature is proposing a reduction in class size, which is now determined locally. Current legislation proposes a program for 3-4-year-old children of migrant workers.

Georgia

Children are not required to enter unless they are seven by September 1; if they are not five by September 1, they must wait until the following year to enter kindergarten. Assessment/testing for kindergarten entry is left to local discretion; however, the state requires that all kindergarten children be screened before being placed in the first grade. (The type of assessment is by local option.) There are no mandated class sizes for kindergarten through grade 3; if average daily attendance exceeds 20 students, districts may hire an aide at minimum wage, with reimbursement by the state.

Complaints about the age cut-off date of December 1 caused a change to September 1. In addition, problems of placement of children who had attended non-accredited schools or out-of-state schools led to the recent "Metro Law," which permits districts to review each case individually and determine grade-level placement. Promotion decisions are determined locally. There are no current legislative proposals other than those proposing more services for handicapped children.

Hawaii

Children must enter school by December 31 of the year of their sixth birthday and must be five by December 1 to enter kindergarten. Provision of kindergarten programs is not mandatory; however, most public schools have programs. Since the 1982-83 school year, special state funds support a program entitled "Early Prevention of School Failure." Under the program, all children are assessed in developmental areas during the fall of their first school year. Promotion is determined by local option. K-12 classes must not exceed 26 students.

Hawaii reported problems associated with immigrants who have had no prior schooling and do not know the English language when entering school. Some parents feel that children are being tested too soon; the State Education Agency has stressed that tests are used to plan for optimal learning. Evaluating the appropriateness of testing methods is currently under way. Any expansion would be difficult without accompanying funding.

Idaho

All children must enter school on or before October 15 of the year of their sixth birthday and must be five by October 1 to enter kindergarten. If a child is enrolled in kindergarten and becomes six on or before October 15,

he/she is placed in the first grade. There are no statewide screening policies. In order for schools to be accredited, kindergarten classes must not exceed 40. Class size must not exceed 23 in grades 1-3. There are no statewide promotion criteria for first grade. Teacher certification standards are being reviewed. State funds are provided only for half-day programs; thus, implementing full-day kindergarten is a problem. Legislators currently see kindergarten as unimportant; one suggested that it be dropped.

Illinois

Children must enroll in school at age seven and must be age five on or before December 1 to be eligible for kindergarten entry. There are no statewide laws or policies regarding screening for kindergarten entry; local districts also determine criteria for promotion to first grade. There are no laws or written policies regarding class size. Parents frequently complain about the age cut-off date; teachers frequently feel that early-entry students lack readiness for kindergarten. Legislation has been proposed to change the age cut-off date to September 1 and to fund all-day kindergarten; however, no action has been taken on either proposal.

Indiana

Children must enter school by age seven and may enter kindergarten at age five. Districts must provide kindergarten programs. The entry cut-off date is determined by local districts and more are moving toward September 1. Screening and promotion to first grade decisions are local options. Class size for kindergarten must not exceed eighteen; if more, an aide must be provided at state expense. This ratio is also being phased in during the next two years for grades 1-3.

Problems exist where children move from one district to another and local policies differ regarding entry age; many early entrants have been found to be too immature and uncoordinated to make adequate progress. Last year the legislature required each district to offer kindergarten programs.

Iowa

If children attain age seven by September 15, they must enter school. They must be five by September 15 to enter kindergarten. Provision of programs is discretionary. While screening is encouraged by the state, policies are locally controlled. Promotion requirements are determined by local option. Only special education classes have mandated-size provisions.

Problems associated with the kindergarten-age cut-off date are reported. Once a child has entered school, he/she may accelerate to the next grade if a locally controlled evaluation reveals readiness. A child who has waited almost another year before entering school may, after about a month, be promoted to first grade. The State Education Agency has recently proposed legislation to expand full-day, every-day kindergarten and funding for preschool.

Kansas

The compulsory attendance law states that a child must enter school if seven years of age by September 1. Schools are not required to provide kindergarten and decisions regarding entry criteria are by local option. If a child is age six at school entry, he/she is placed in the first grade. Districts have total autonomy regarding class size, screening and promotion; some do offer kindergarten as half-day or alternating day programs. There have been no proposed changes other than for special education students.

Kentucky

Currently, all children must enter school by October 1 of the year of their seventh birthday. Kindergarten attendance is currently optional. In September 1985, kindergarten will be mandatory and all children must enroll if they are age five by October 1. The state has an essential skills inventory that is available for screening. At the present time, districts may choose to incorporate this into testing and it may become mandatory in 1985. Promotion criteria are developed locally. Mandatory maximum class size for kindergarten is 29. For first through third grades, the maximum size is 27. Problems exist with the age cut-off date, with over-crowding in kindergarten classes (the state provides funds for a 50 students per teacher ratio) and with compulsory kindergarten attendance. There are likely to be transportation problems with half-day, every-day programs and the result may be full-day, alternate-day programs. Mandating kindergarten was so difficult to accomplish that no further changes are proposed at this time.

Louisiana

Prior to legislation just enacted, children must have entered first grade at age seven. For kindergarten entry, they must have been age 5 within the first four months of kindergarten entry (December 31). The new law is now being interpreted to require compulsory attendance if age six by December 31, and each succeeding year would change the date until 1988 when children would be required to enter school if age six by September 30. It is expected that the kindergarten-age cut-off date will be age five by September 1. Kindergarten attendance was mandated this year. Each parish develops its own screening policies, and while the state has minimum standards for K-12, kindergarten children are neither retained nor promoted on the basis of test results. K-3 classes must not exceed 29 students. Legislation enacted this year provided $300,000 for 10 pilot, early-childhood projects, which included preschool and the establishment of kindergarten for children with developmental problems.

Maine

Children entering first grade must be seven by October 15 and those entering kindergarten must be five on or before October 15. While attendance in kindergarten has not been required, full-day state funding has been provided. Effective July 1, 1985, provision of kindergarten programs will be mandatory. Most schools provide half-day programs; where children must be transported to schools from the islands, full-day programs are provided. Until a few weeks ago, schools developed their own screening process. The new law ow requires the State Education Agency to plan and provide screening

requirements. Recommended class sizes are 20 for kindergarten and 30 for grades 1-3. Some complaints have been received about the age cut-off date. Promotion criteria are developed locally.

Maryland

If age six by December 31, a child must enter first grade, and children may attend kindergarten if age five by December 1. The law requires the provision of kindergarten programs. Districts may waive the eligibility dates for either kindergarten or first grade if locally determined screening measures indicate readiness at an earlier date. There have been problems regarding these waivers. Districts have local control over class sizes and promotion to first grade. The legislature has supported early childhood programs and has provided funding for pilot programs and full-day kindergarten.

Massachusetts

Children must enter school when age six by December 31. While districts are required to offer kindergarten, attendance is not mandated and districts have autonomy regarding entry age. Some children are accepted at age four, while others accept them only at age five. Children are specially tested only if they are felt to have a special need. Promotion to first grade is determined by local decision. The recommended class size is 18 for kindergarten and 25 in grades 1-3. Entry-age requirements often produce complaints. A current reform proposal would appropriate more funds for early childhood programs; however, many feel that only grades 1-12 programs should receive more funding.

Michigan

The compulsory attendance age is six by December 1, and children must be five on or before December 1 to enter kindergarten. Districts are reimbursed for full-day programs, and although provision of programs is discretionary, this has been an incentive for developing a variety of programs. Screening procedures and promotion policies are developed locally. There are no mandated or state-recommended class-size provisions. Problems have developed regarding local screening assessments, and the State Education Agency is trying to coordinate testing throughout the state. The state is currently studying early childhood education, particularly for children with special needs.

Minnesota

Children who are age seven by September 1 must enter school. Those entering mandated kindergarten classes must be five by September 1. Districts are required to provide screening for preschool-aged children, but children are not required to be screened. Competency requirements for promotion are determined locally. Class size cannot be larger than 30 for K-3. A current legislative proposal would provide state funds for some full-day kindergarten programs. Legislation recently was passed to provide funds for an "Early Childhood Family Education Program," primarily a program for parents with children between ages 0-5.

Mississippi

Children must enter school when age seven by September 1. Currently no public kindergarten mandate exists; however, it is hoped that a new law appropriating funding for programs will become effective and that programs will be fully implemented by 1986-87. Many people have complained about the lack of kindergarten programs in public schools.

Missouri

Children must enter school when age seven by September 30 and must be five by September 30 to enter kindergarten. Districts must provide programs. Children must receive health and developmental/cognitive screening at the kindergarten level; screening procedures are developed locally. Criteria used for promotion are also determined locally. Recommended class size is 20 for K-3. During the last legislative session, teacher organizations proposed legislation to move the entrance age back one month per school year until a July 1 age cut-off date could be reached. This enacted legislation may be repealed. Next year a proposal will require that children aged 1-4 also receive the screening now required for kindergarten students.

Montana

Children must enter school when age six by September 10. While the state has no mandated age cut-off date for kindergarten, 98% of those children reaching age 5 by September 10 are enrolled in kindergarten programs, which are discretionary. Districts may, at their option, administer readiness tests and promote/retain children. The recommended class size is 20 in K-3 programs. A proposal is expected to be introduced during the next session that would not only mandate kindergarten for all students, but also preschool programs for the handicapped.

Nebraska

Children must attend school when age six by October 15 and must be five by October 15 to enter kindergarten. Accredited schools must provide kindergarten classes. If a child has completed kindergarten, he/she may enter first grade at any age. Some districts permit early kindergarten entry if the parents can show evidence from a physician that the child is in good physical health. Local districts have almost total autonomy. There are few mandates, and none in early childhood education have been proposed recently.

Nevada

Children must enter school if they attain age seven by September 30 and must be age five by September 30 to enter kindergarten. Local districts are permitted to allow earlier entry where children have been identified as gifted. There are no state laws regarding provision of programs, screening, promotion or class sizes. Many kindergartens have a 30/1 pupil/teacher ratio. The State Education Agency is proposing that provision of kindergarten be made mandatory.

New Hampshire

Children must enter school if age six by September 30. Kindergarten is not required and entry age is by local option. Local districts are not required to screen children, but some use the Gesell Developmental Test. About half of the parents support testing. Criteria for promotion are developed locally. The State Education Agency recommends class sizes of 20/1 for K-3. More problems are associated with entry age at the first-grade level than kindergarten. The State Education Agency has proposed making kindergarten mandatory for three or four legislative sessions, and although the momentum is positive, the question of who pays remains.

New Jersey

Children must attend school at age six, must be over four and under six to enter kindergarten. Districts are not required to offer kindergarten. The age cut-off date is left to local discretion, and although entry ages vary 6-7 months, the average is October 1. Once a kindergarten program is established in a district, the provision of classes is no longer permissive and districts must enroll all five-year-olds and may enroll four-year-olds. All children are screened at school entry to determine their need for compensatory education. Class sizes must not exceed 25, however, county superintendents may grant exceptions and allow 26-29 with an aide. If there are more than 30 in a class, the class must be divided into two. There have been problems regarding district entry age, curriculum, and screening. In some districts where expectations are higher, age cut-off dates have been changed to require children to be older; other districts have made opposite moves where children have had preschool and exhibit readiness. It is reported that statewide laws, rather than local autonomy, could eliminate many complaints. While no legislation is currently proposed, there is discussion about the curriculum and extended-day programs.

New Mexico

Children must attend school at age six and must be five by September 1 to enter kindergarten, which must be offered. Kindergarten students are screened only for health problems; the State Education Agency does not encourage specific testing. Class size for kindergarten must not exceed 20; for grades 1-3 the maximum class size is 26. Although the State Education Agency has developed some standards that must be met, local districts have autonomy regarding competencies, curriculum, and evaluation. Some parents want their children to enter kindergarten at age four.

New York

Children must attend school at age six, and if programs are provided, children must be five by December 1 to enter kindergarten. Legislation effective in 1980 mandated screening for new entrants at all grade levels, primarily for the purpose of identifying the gifted and the handicapped. Class sizes are negotiated by teachers through unions with school boards in most districts. Districts incorporate their own competency requirements for promotion to first grade. The State Education Agency receives complaints about the age cut-off date and unreliable tests. The Board of Regents is working on a plan for education from preschool through adult education; however, major changes so far proposed will not affect lower grade levels.

North Carolina

The compulsory attendance age is seven, and children entering kindergarten must be five by October 16. Districts may offer programs at their discretion. While screening is not mandatory, both the State Education Agency and local districts work closely with the state and local health departments. Kindergarten class sizes may be as high as 26 with an aide, or under hardship conditions, 29 with an aide. There are no competency requirements for promotion to first grade. Problem areas are the kindergarten curriculum and the parent push for readiness tests. A task force will soon begin studying full-day day care for three-four-year-olds. While there is not a lot of support for the public school system's assuming responsibility for day care (currently state-licensed), some money may be granted in the near future for this purpose.

North Dakota

Children must attend school at age seven. Where programs are offered, if a child is five between August 31 and December 31, local districts may administer a test and allow entry into kindergarten. If the child reaches age 5 after December 31, the child must wait a year. Districts must screen kindergarten students using one or more instruments approved by the state. Districts must keep class sizes at 25 in average daily membership or less in order to receive state aid. Problem areas include the entry-age cut-off date and that not all districts offer kindergarten. Also, some districts offer kindergarten on a full-day basis for 90 days, rather than one-half day programs during the school year. Students in kindergarten cannot be retained due to a lack of academic progress. No legislation is currently proposed.

Oklahoma

School attendance is compulsory at age six. Kindergarten programs must be offered and students must be age 5 by September 1 to enter. Some districts allow earlier entry with developmental testing. No screening is required on a statewide basis, but twenty-five pilot screening programs have been in existence for four years. Local districts are penalized on their average daily attendance funding if they permit a kindergarten class size of over 25. Although there have been some problems with non-readiness at age five, no changes are currently being proposed.

Ohio

School attendance is compulsory at age 6 and children must be 5 by September 30 to enter kindergarten, which districts must offer. Children are not generally screened unless they are potential special education students. Many districts elect to test children for kindergarten entry if they are age 5 after September 30. There are no competency requirements for promotion to first grade. A new statewide standard regarding class size will be in effect in 1986 - K-4 classes will be limited to no more than 25 students. There is currently a debate regarding the efficacy of half-day, every-day kindergarten versus full-day every other day.

Oregon

Children must begin school when they are age 6 by November 15. Currently, children may attend kindergarten if they are age 5 by November 15; however, the age cut-off date will change to October 1 in 1985 and to September 1 in 1986. Provision of kindergarten programs will become mandatory in 1989. Local districts may allow earlier entry for gifted students, but this is done more frequently at the 1st grade level. The State Education Agency recommends standards regarding screening. State standards for promotion to first grade are in the planning stage. A class size of 24 is recommended for kindergarten. With more children, an aide is recommended. The average class size is now 22.

Problems with the age cut-off date led to changes. At the request of the General Assembly, the State Education Agency is in the process of recommending a new policy statement regarding a statewide plan for education, which will include recommendations for curriculum in grades K-3 and competency requirements for promotion to first grade.

Pennsylvania

The compulsory attendance age is eight, and where programs are provided, students must be five by January 1 to enter kindergarten. Some districts permit earlier entry for children who are advanced and whose test scores are two years above their chronological age. No statewide screening is required. Districts have discretion over promotion. While there are no state requirements regarding class size, the average is 26 in K-3. Some proposals are being developed to encourage districts to operate preschool programs.

Rhode Island

Children must attend school at age seven and may attend kindergarten if they have reached the age of five by December 31. While provision of programs is mandated, Rhode Island allows local autonomy in testing, criteria for promotion, and class size. Recent legislation that would have moved the age cut-off date from December 31 to August 30 failed; during hearings, moving the date back one month per year to eventually reach the August date was suggested. No legislation has been proposed for early childhood education this year.

South Carolina

Attendance is compulsory at age six. Children must be age 5 by November 1 to enter kindergarten, unless the child moves to the district from a kindergarten class in another state. There are no screening mandates for kindergarten, but teachers are encouraged to use a diagnostic developmental test to assess readiness. Kindergarten classes must have a maximum of 30 students, with an aide. Last year class size in grades 1-3 was reduced to 20, based on average daily membership. Each district sets its policy for retention/promotion. Recent legislation mandated kindergarten and provided a 1% increase in overall funding for education.

South Dakota

Attendance is compulsory at age 7 and kindergarten students must be age 5 by September 1 to enter. There are no statewide provisions for screening instruments; some districts use the Dial or Denver screening instruments or assessments developed locally. There are no state limits on class size. Promotions are also at local discretion. A number of problems are reported due to a lack of state regulations. There are no proposed changes at this time.

Tennessee

Currently, attendance is compulsory when a child is age 6 by October 31; in 1986 the cut-off date will be September 30. Children will have to reach the age of five by September 30 in 1985 to enter kindergarten (now October 31). There are two exceptions to the law - a child entering a Tennessee school from another state may enter kindergarten if age 5 on or before December 1, and a child identified as gifted may enter if age 4 on or before September 30. The State Education Agency is developing guidelines for districts to use in screening - they must prepare a developmental profile for each child prior to entrance into first grade - in all areas, such a math, reading, gross motor, social and emotional development. Districts are establishing promotion requirements informally; these often become formal. Class size for kindergarten is limited to 25 and state funding has been made available for aides.

Problems exist with the age cut-off date; with the high cost of day care, parents want their children enrolled early. There are also problems with validity and reliability of tests. A recent proposal to mandate provision of kindergarten failed. The State Education Agency is currently developing curriculum requirements for K-12. A K-4 program planning guide will include planning classroom instruction, planning classroom management, and evaluating students.

Texas

The compulsory attendance age is seven. To attend kindergarten, which must be offered, children must be age five on or before September 1. There are no statewide screening requirements with the exception of handicapped students. Next year, districts may serve four-year-old disadvantaged students. State law, effective in 1985, will require class sizes of 23 students per teacher. Some parents complain about the entry age cut-off date; programs for preschool handicapped children may eliminate many complaints. There has just been reform wherein local districts must develop policies and procedures to assure that students have mastered essential elements in order to be promoted.

Utah

Children must enter school if age six by September 1 and must be age five by September 1 to enter kindergarten. The State Education Agency has attempted to make screening mandatory but has not been successful. There are no mandated class sizes, and many classes have 29 students per teacher. Currently, legislation is proposed to lower class sizes to at least 24.

Parents sometimes complain about the age cut-off date, but are referred to the statute. Promotion criteria are determined locally. To date, there has been no legislation proposed to make provision of kindergarten programs mandatory.

Vermont

Children must enter school by age seven. Provision of kindergarten is not mandatory although 85% of the children attend. Entry age is determined locally, and while most permit entry at age five, some districts test. If a child shows a developmental lag, parents receive a recommendation to keep the child at home another year. Promotion criteria are developed locally. Under a law effective August 1984, class size is restricted to 20 in grades 1-6, or up to 25 with an aide. Both the State Education Agency and local districts have proposed mandatory kindergarten, with no legislative success. Kindergarten and preschool programs will be top priority items during the next legislative session. As a result of the governor's early childhood initiatives, Vermont has recently developed an early childhood education institute, an intensive week-long workshop for teachers and those involved in day care and follow-through. Communications networks have been established to promote education for 3-8-year-olds. Institutes will be continued.

Virginia

Children must enter school if they are age 6 by December 31 and may enter kindergarten, which districts must offer, if age 5 by December 31. There are no statewide screening requirements. However, State Education Agency regulations require that if a child enters kindergarten at age five before December 31, he/she must be counseled by the principal or guidance counselor prior to entry. Maximum class size is 30 students per teacher; with over 25 students, there must be an aide. Promotion is a prerogative of local districts. The State Education Agency provides guidelines for basic skills standards of learning. There have been entry-age problems with children moving from other states. Many younger children have had such limited experiences that they are not ready to enter kindergarten. Within the next year or two, the legislature is expected to consider supporting preschool programs due to the low developmental level of the state's rural children.

Washington

Children must attend school when they reach the age of 8 by August 31. The kindergarten age requirement is age 5 by midnight August 31. Local districts have options for earlier entry. Some of the larger districts do not permit early entry. Those who do must screen for developmental, social and academic readiness, using whatever instruments they choose. The average K-3 class size cannot be larger than class sizes in grades 4-12. Size varies among districts. Parents frequently complain about unfair screening and challenge placement based on screening. Complaints cannot be pursued at the state level. Promotion/retention is determined by local districts. Preschool for handicapped children is state funded; other programs require local financial support. Interest has been generated to expand the state funding for kindergarten programs, which districts must offer.

West Virginia

Children must enroll in school at age 6. Districts must offer kindergarten and children must enter if age 5 prior to September 1. Local districts may permit earlier entry if a child shows readiness based on a test of basic skills. State law requires vision, hearing, language and speech screening. The State Education Agency is developing learner outcome guidelines for K-12 and in about a year, may require a test for promotion. Class size for kindergarten must be no more than 20 students. Complaints occur about the fact that one district may allow early, entry while a neighboring one may not. The age cut-off date was changed from November 1 to September 1 in 1982 at the same time that class size and screening laws became effective.

Wisconsin

Children are required to attend school at age 6 and may attend kindergarten upon becoming five by December 1. Some districts permit earlier entry and using State Education Agency guidelines, base eligibility upon screening and testing along with consultation with parents and the school psychologist. The State Education Agency recommends no more than 20-22 children per class K-8. There have been few problems associated with early entrance since all local districts must offer kindergarten and must have written entry policies. Reimbursement is now allowed for all-day kindergarcen, and most districts are going to all-day every other day programs (for transportation purposes).

Wyoming

At age 6, children must attend school. While kindergarten attendance is not mandatory, children who become age 5 by September 15 may attend. Districts do not permit earlier entry and do not screen. Promotion criteria and class size are determined locally. Some groups are beginning to propose mandated preschool programs.

Appendix A
COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AGE BY STATE

Age	Compulsory Attendance
Alabama	7
Alaska	6
Arizona	8
Arkansas	7
California	6
Colorado	6
Connecticut	7
Delaware	6
Florida	6
Georgia	7
Hawaii	6
Idaho	6
Illinois	7
Indiana	7
Iowa	7

Age	Compulsory Attendance
Kansas	7
Kentucky	6
Louisiana	7
Maine	7
Maryland	6
Massachusetts	6
Michigan	7
Minnesota	7
Mississippi	7
Missouri	6
Montana	6
Nebraska	7
Nevada	6
New Hampshire	6
New Jersey	6
New Mexico	6
New York	7
North Carolina	7
North Dakota	7
Ohio	6
Oklahoma	6
Oregon	6
Pennsylvania	8
Rhode Island	7
South Carolina	6
South Dakota	7
Tennessee	6
Texas	7
Utah	6
Vermont	7
Virginia	6
Washington	8
West Virginia	6
Wisconsin	6
Wyoming	6

APPENDIX B

KINDERGARTEN ELIGIBILITY: AGE CRITERION/CUT-OFF DATES

STATE	Local Discretion	Under Age 5	5 by Aug. 31	5 by Sept. 1	5 by Sept. 15	5 by Sept. 30	5 by Oct. 1	5 by Oct. 15	5 by Oct. 16	5 by Nov. 1	5 by Nov. 2	5 by Nov. 15	5 by Dec. 1	5 by Dec. 31	5 by Jan. 1
Alabama							X								
Alaska											X				
Arizona				X											
Arkansas							X								
California [1]		X													
Colorado	X														
Connecticut															X
Delaware															X
Florida				X											
Georgia				X											
Hawaii														X	
Idaho								X							
Illinois													X		
Indiana	X														
Iowa					X										
Kansas	X														
Kentucky							X								
Louisiana														X	
Maine								X							
Maryland														X	
Massachusetts	X														
Michigan													X		
Minnesota				X											
Mississippi [2]															
Missouri						X									
Montana	X														
Nebraska								X							
Nevada						X									
New Hampshire	X														
New Jersey [3]		X													
New Mexico				X											
New York													X		
North Carolina									X						
North Dakota			X												
Ohio						X									
Oklahoma				X											
Oregon [4]												X			
Pennsylvania															X
Rhode Island														X	
South Carolina										X					
South Dakota				X											
Tennessee [5]						X									
Texas				X											
Utah				X											
Vermont	X														
Virginia														X	
Washington			X												
West Virginia				X											
Wisconsin													X		
Wyoming					X										

1 - 4 years nine months by Sept. 1 (equates to age 5 by Dec. 1)
2 - Kindergarten to begin in 1986-87 if funding appropriated
3 - Must be over age 4 and under age 6
4 - In 1986, must be age 5 by Sept. 1
5 - Effective in 1986 (now 10/31)

Information obtained from a telephone survey of state departments of education during September and October, 1984.

Appendix C

PERSONS CONTACTED BY STATE

Alabama - Jackie Aucrey, Bill Ward

Alaska - Heather Hansen

Arizona - Sarah Robertson

Arkansas - John Floor

California - Pat McGinnis, Robert Seventes

Colorado - Virginia Plunket

Connecticut - Carolyn Lester

Delaware - Barbara Humphrys

Florida - Joanne Chancy

Georgia - Kay Lalimer

Hawaii - Nora Hubbard

Idaho - Helen Williams

Illinois - Chalmer Moore

Indiana - Sally Agnes

Iowa - John Martin

Kansas - Vern Stevens

Kentucky- Cathy Crum

Louisiana - Sandy Lot, Kay Swearingen

Maine - Daryl Hahn

Maryland - Mr. Sholes

Massachusetts - John Reynolds

Michigan - Marvin McKinney

Minnesota - Corrina Moncada

Mississippi - Cathy Greys

Missouri - Mildred Winters

Montana - Kelly Evans

Nebraska - Esther Arganbright

Nevada - Patricia Weninger

New Hampshire - John Economopoulos

New Jersey - Tynette Hills

New Mexico - Sharon Morris

New York - Sue Updyke

North Carolina - Charlotte Barnes

North Dakota - Ethel Lowry

Ohio - Irene Bandy

Oklahoma - Mary Reed, Karen Smith

Oregon - Jean Spaulding

Pennsylvania - Jessie Sanders

Rhode Island - Patrick McCarthy

South Carolina - Janet Perry, Hannah Meadors

Tennessee - Faye Taylor

Texas - Joene Grissom

Utah - Bernard First, Anna Marie Dunlap

Vermont - John Poeton

Virginia - Win Mahoney

Washington - Bill Everhart

West Virginia - Al Canonico

Wisconsin - Doris Cook

Wyoming - Anna Kitchener

DLN/2700h